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Intervention a must, exiled Honduran says

By Tom Diaz
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MIAMI — Nicaraguan resistance fighters can't win their war against the Marxist Sandinista government without armed intervention by other nations, according to Gen. Gustavo A. Alvarez Martinez, the former commander of the Honduran armed forces.

Gen. Alvarez, who was ousted in 1984 and forced from the country at gunpoint, broke over a year's silence this week in an exclusive interview with The Washington Times.

Prior to the overthrow, Gen. Alvarez was one of the United States' strongest friends in Central America. He was instrumental in organizing international aid for the Nicaraguan resistance forces, and he forged for Honduras a front-line role in U.S. policy in the region.

Gen. Alvarez said his ouster has been a setback for the United States because it can no longer count on firm Honduran support for either the Nicaraguan resistance forces or for overall U.S. policy.

Sources interviewed in recent weeks said that after Gen. Alvarez' ouster, the Honduran government forced the resistance fighters to close a hospital in Tegucigalpa and imposed severe limits on Contra activity in Honduras.

"This [change in attitude] has caused the United States to accept short-term solutions," Gen. Alvarez said. "It won't pursue the ultimate solutions to the problems of Central America.

"The military actions of the Contras show to the world that there is real political opposition against the regime," he said. "The Contras are 100 percent Nicaraguan, but anybody who believes that they can overthrow the government is mistaken."

He said he has remained silent in order to protect members of his family — his father, two brothers and four sisters — still living in Honduras. But a dishonorable discharge handed down by Honduran authorities last month, announced last week in the press, prompted him to break his silence.

"Now they have exhausted my patience," Gen. Alvarez said. "They have gone beyond the limit and I am going to speak out. . . . I have lost my honor. More than anything, it's the moral indignity before the Honduran people and my friends."

He said he had been given no warning that the discharge was pending and had never been formally charged with an offense. He said he intends to fight the action in the civil courts.

Armando Alvarez Martinez, the general's brother, who is a lawyer living in Tegucigalpa, said he intends to file a petition with the Honduran Supreme Court today asking that the discharge be suspended until the courts finish an investigation. "I want you to know that I don't know what they are going to do against me," Mr. Alvarez, who was with the general during the interview, said. "But I have to defend my brother."

Gen. Alvarez cited as an example of the United States being forced to limit its options the inability of the Nicaraguan resistance forces to win their fight without more direct help. "That might be possible after a long war," Gen. Alvarez said. "But nobody is prepared for that kind of war — nobody, not my country, not the United States, not your Congress, not your people. The Western mentality is simply not prepared for prolonged war.

"The solution is military action," he said, "something like Grenada, through a multilateral force . . . within the framework of CONDECA [Central American Defense Council] and the Treaty of Rio.

"The action would have the purpose only of liberating Nicaragua, not occupying it," he said, "so that the people of Nicaragua could have the democratic option of electing the government they want."

Gen. Alvarez said the resistance forces would play a key role in such a move, "like the French Maquis during the Allied invasion of France during the Second World War."

He said there has never been a pact among nations to pursue such a plan. But he said some officers had discussed it as a backup plan that might come about "if the political Gen. Alvarez contended his ouster was the result of a conspiracy organized by his successor, Gen. Walter Lopez, and three other officers, after they were told that they were being reassigned because of incompetence. "They failed in their jobs affecting the security of the nation," Gen. Alvarez said.

He denied ever having political ambitions and said he was shocked to learn that Honduran President Roberto Suazo Cordova "was involved" in his ouster. He speculated that the president wanted him out of the way so he would not be forced from office after his constitutional term expired.

Gen. Alvarez spoke heatedly about the likelihood of U.S. involvement in the overthrow. "I have no proof and I am not making any charges," he said. "But I can't believe that the CIA and the embassy could not have known what was going on. If they didn't know, what kind of functionaries are they?"

John D. Negroponte, who at the time of the ouster was the U.S. ambassador to Honduras, said he was surprised by the overthrow, as did other U.S. officials. Mr. Negroponte, now assistant secretary of state for oceans and international environmental and scientific affairs, could not be reached for comment.

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